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ABSTRACT

This final report describes activities and accomplishments of a 3-year federally supported personnel preparation program at Stephen F. Austin University (Texas) to train graduate-level personnel to serve children and youth with serious emotional disturbance and autism (SED/A). The program was designed to recruit, train, and seek employment in Texas and Louisiana for teachers of students with SED/A. The program emphasized field experiences, research-based coursework and pedagogy, and recruitment of students from traditionally underrepresented populations. It also conducted a summer program on a local school campus for children with behavior disorders and autism, with the graduate students serving as interns. The project successfully recruited and graduated 72 students: 28 with a Master's Degree, 3 with a SED/A endorsement, and 41 undergraduates with coursework completed toward the SED/A endorsement. Twenty-three percent of the students were from minority backgrounds. The summer program served 38-43 children, ages 6-14, with academic and behavioral difficulties each summer. The report provides details of tasks associated with each of the project's six objectives. (DB)

**Preparing Personnel to Work with Children with Serious Emotional
Disturbance and Autism
Final Report
Grant # H325H990124**

**Project Director
Glen McCuller**

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PREPARING PERSONNEL TO WORK WITH CHILDREN WITH SERIOUS EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE AND AUTISM

ABSTRACT

The Department of Human Services at Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA) has completed a three-year personnel preparation project to provide graduate-level training for personnel to serve children and youth with serious emotional disturbance and autism.

The primary objective of the proposed program was to prepare graduate-level students to teach children with serious emotional disturbance and autism (SED/Autism). Accomplishment of this objective addressed the increasing numbers of students with serious emotional disturbance as well as the critical shortage of teachers nationwide and specifically in the states of Texas and Louisiana. The program emphasized field experiences, research-based coursework and pedagogy, and recruitment of students from traditionally underrepresented populations. It conducted a semester-long summer program on a local school campus for children with behavior disorders and autism, with the graduate students serving as interns.

The project successfully recruited and graduated 72 students: 28 with a Master's Degree in Special Education - SED/A emphasis, three postgraduate students with the SED/Autism endorsement, and 41 undergraduates with coursework completed toward the endorsement in SED/Autism. Twenty-three percent (23%) of the students were from minority backgrounds, 7% had a disability, and 10% were males, who are underrepresented in special education. Each year, children were recruited from the community to attend the project's summer program. Each summer, this program served 38-43 children, ages 6-14, with academic and behavioral difficulties. Many of the children attended the summer program for all three years. The summer program served children with diagnosed disabilities as well as children who did not qualify for special education.

INTRODUCTION

To address a critical shortage of personnel in the area of serious emotional disturbance and autism (SED/A), Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA) conducted a three-year preservice project to prepare personnel to serve children and youth with these disabilities. The program was designed to increase the number of teachers fully qualified in the area of serious emotional disturbance and autism. By using its prime location in rural Deep East Texas, the project was able to recruit and prepare personnel likely to remain in or gravitate towards rural settings.

Built upon a foundation in applied behavior analysis, this program was based on the philosophy that services for children and youth with serious emotional disturbance and autism must focus on effective instruction and management provided by well-trained professionals who understand and can implement the principles of learning. Sponsored by the Department of Human Services, the project was unique because the department houses a variety of disciplines: special education, speech/language pathology, counseling, visual impairment, hearing impairment, orientation and mobility, and rehabilitation. Opportunities also existed for significant interaction with other departments, notably psychology, sociology, and social work.

The project's target audience included trainees in undergraduate and graduate teacher education programs and practicing teachers in programs for students with SED/A who are working without an endorsement.

OBJECTIVES AND PURPOSE OF PROGRAM

The project began September 1, 1999, and ended March 31, 2003. The program was designed to recruit, train, and seek employment in the states of Texas and Louisiana for 36 teachers of students with SED/A. Overall, the purpose was to curtail the shortage of trained personnel in

Texas and Louisiana, especially in rural areas. Through federal funding, financial assistance was provided to the university students as they sought certification. Minority students and students with disabilities were actively recruited. Objectives and tasks associated with this project were:

- (1) Recruit 36 students (12 per year) into the SED/A program, emphasizing minority students, students from rural areas, and students with disabilities.**

Associated tasks:

- A. Recruitment materials were developed describing project and available financial assistance. The materials consisted of an informational flyer and introductory letter. Letters were developed to target students and also for others who could assist in recruitment: namely, State Education Agencies, school districts, and university personnel.
- B. The prime areas of recruitment involved Texas and Louisiana because in Texas, 205 of 254 counties are classified as rural, as are 50 of Louisiana's 64 parishes. The recruitment materials were mailed to surrounding area Texas Education Service Centers, to Louisiana's State Education Department Office for distribution to constituent school districts, and to public school superintendents and directors of special education in East Texas schools.
- C. The traditionally African-American colleges and universities and universities with large Hispanic populations were contacted. In Texas, department of education administrators at Prairie View A & M University, Texas Southern University, Pan American University, and Jarvis Christian College were sent recruitment information. In Louisiana, Grambling State University was contacted. Although these universities supported our grant and agreed to post the information, we recruited only one student from these universities.

- D. Recruitment information was sent to Stephen F. Austin State University's post-baccalaureate students who were working on initial teacher certification and recent graduates with undergraduate degrees in related fields. Flyers were posted across campus and presentations were made to classes containing graduating seniors in related fields and at meetings for student teachers. In recruiting students, we had the most success with the contacts in the related fields of speech and hearing and rehabilitation.
 - E. The local media was contacted through the SFA Office of Public Affairs. Interviews with the project director were aired on local television and radio programs promoting recruitment. Informational articles were placed in newspapers in the surrounding East Texas communities of Nacogdoches, Lufkin, Longview, Tyler, Marshall, Dallas, and Houston. Many of our applicants learned of our scholarship program through the newspaper articles.
 - F. Over the approximate three and a half year period, the project recruited 31 students who ultimately earned their Master's in Special Education – SED/A emphasis. Of these 31 students, 23% were of ethnic minority, 7% had a disability, and 10% were males, an underrepresented group in special education.
- (2) **Provide training that results in a Master of Education degree with an SED/A emphasis for 24 students not currently special education certified, and to provide training to current special education teachers in the field leading to a SED endorsement.**

Associated Tasks:

- A. Financial assistance was awarded to teachers who were not currently certified in special education, so they could work towards a Master of Education degree in Special Education

with an emphasis in SED/A. The Behavior Disorders/Autism Training Program is a 36-hour program with SED/A coursework and field experiences with children with SED/A. Scholarships were used as a recruitment tool.

- B. Scholarships were also awarded to post-baccalaureate students holding teacher certification in special education, so they could take an extra 12 hours of coursework and obtain the SED/A endorsement.
- C. Altogether, the project awarded \$331,904 to 31 students over the three and a half years of the grant. Twenty-eight students were full-time graduate students working toward a Master's in Special Education with an emphasis in SED/Autism. Three of the scholarship students earned the SED/A endorsement. The project was designed to recruit and train 12 students per year (8 full-time and 4 part-time) adding the SED/A endorsement: thus, 24 full-time and 12-part-time. Due to considerable difficulty in recruiting part-time students, permission was granted to use funds to add full-time students seeking the Master's and special education certification with the SED/A endorsement. As a result, the project trained 28 full-time students (vs. the proposed 24) and three part-time (vs. the proposed 12). Because of the grant money, classes were available for an additional forty-one non-scholarship students to become eligible for the endorsement.
- D. This project was designed to meet both competitive preferences under this priority by recruiting underrepresented populations and students with disabilities and assisting graduates in finding employment with rural school systems. Of the 31 students receiving financial assistance, 10% are from underrepresented populations (i.e., male); 23% are

from an ethnic minority background (African-American, Hispanic, Native American); and 7% have a disability.

- (3) **Provide classroom instruction to students, which reflects best-practices in the education of children with serious emotional disturbance and autism.**

Associated tasks:

- A. All courses, developed for this grant or required for the students, were reviewed for course content in relation to special education literature and the Texas-mandated Examination for the Certification of Educators (ExCET) competencies.
- B. Instruction was presented using lectures, guest speakers, cooperative learning, demonstrations, role-plays, case studies, and technology, including laserdisc and video.
- C. Grant students were provided specialized training in Nonviolent Crisis Prevention Intervention.
- D. Finally, grant students were also provided several field trips with partial stipends and transportation at grant expense to further their preparation. Students attended the Texas Council for Exceptional Children Conference in Houston, Texas. Students visited the St. Louis School in Tyler, Texas, a special use facility that utilizes physical/occupational water therapy, a TEACHH program, a sensory motor lab, community-based instruction, and therapeutic and recreational horseback riding. Students visited the Boys Ranch in Nacogdoches, Texas. This is a residential program for boys diagnosed with SED focusing on academic as well as behavioral objectives. Finally, students in the program also visited a variety of special educational settings in the Lufkin and Nacogdoches (Texas) Independent School District including: adaptive behavior classrooms, self-

contained classrooms, content mastery classes, and preschool programs for comprehensive disabilities (PPCD).

- (4) Provide settings to students that allow field experience of trained skills under close, competent supervision.**

Associated Tasks:

- A. The students chosen to participate in the scholarship program were provided practical experiences utilizing settings with well-qualified, cooperating teachers. The students were placed in special education classrooms for a total of 12 hours per week for the fall and spring semesters. The responsibilities of the university students in the classrooms included observations, teaching individuals or small groups under the cooperating teacher's guidance, and clerical work or other classroom tasks as deemed appropriate by the cooperating teacher.
- B. The cooperating teachers and the practicum supervisor worked together to coordinate knowledge-based competencies provided in the classroom with skills required in field experience. The practicum supervisor visited the special education classrooms weekly and observed the university student's interactions with the special education students and completed an observation form rating the student's performance or gave general comments regarding the student's performance and instructional procedures in the classroom. The cooperating teachers also completed evaluation forms at mid-semester and at the end of each semester giving the student feedback regarding performance.

- C. The students were provided systematic and effective supervision of practical experiences. A group practica meeting was held each week to discuss problems and share experiences.
- D. During the summer semester, the students completed their student teaching requirement by serving as teachers in a summer clinic for students with disabilities. Each year the summer program served 38 to 43 children (aged 6-14) with academic and behavioral difficulties. The children were recruited from the local community. Summer Clinic brochures and application forms were mailed to regional special education coordinators and principals. Informational articles were also placed in the surrounding area newspapers and an informational spot was recorded and played on local radio and featured in the community bulletin board on local television stations.
- E. The children were given a screening placement test to determine the academic level of reading and math skills. The summer program served children who did not qualify for special education as well as children with diagnosed disabilities. A variety of disabilities were served, including students diagnosed with ED, ED/LD, LD, AU, SI, LD/SI, ED/LD/SI, and OHI. Each year, at least 32% of the children were African-American and 7% were Hispanic. At least half of the children were recruited from the Nacogdoches Boys Ranch, which is a facility for boys who have been removed from their parents and have diagnosed emotional problems. The summer program also provided Extended Year Services for children enrolled in a self-contained special education classroom in the Nacogdoches County Special Education Cooperative. Three of these students were diagnosed as autistic and attended the program all three years. Several of the children attended the summer program for all three years.

F. The Project Director and the Project Coordinator/Supervisor supervised the summer clinic. The teacher interns used Direct Instruction materials and methods and the Walker Social Skills curricula with the children in the Summer Program. Materials were purchased with monies from the grant and placed in a resource room to be used by other students enrolled in special education classes at SFASU. The Direct Instruction teaching techniques and materials provided high levels of student engagement within academically focused, teacher-directed groups. Our pre- and post-test data during the summer program indicated the effectiveness of the Direct Instruction materials and teaching method. The Direct Instruction model also gave the beginning teacher the structure to ensure success for learners. Most of our graduates are now using the materials and/or the strategies in their own special education classroom.

(5) Develop procedures whereby graduates find employment in educating students with SED/A.

Associated Tasks:

- A. Scholarship students attended the SFA Job Fair offered in the Spring and Summer; this job fair brings in most regional school districts to schedule interviews and visits to their schools.
- B. All grant students registered with the SFASU Placement Office meeting as a group to discuss effective procedures for obtaining teaching positions.
- C. At this time, all of the funded grant students who completed the program were offered positions as special education teachers of students and serve children with SED/A. However, one of the graduates became ill during her application process, but entered the

program. Due to the seriousness of her prognosis, it was necessary for her to be exempted from years of service required for payback. Thus, of the 31 students awarded funding to become special education certified and/or add the SED/A endorsement, 30 are employed.

(6) Evaluated program to ensure completion of all objectives.

- A. Upon beginning the project, students were surveyed on their perceptions concerning their academic and behavior management skills. As expected, these students were apprehensive about their abilities and believed that the training and experiences of the project were required prior to taking a special education teaching position. At the conclusion of the project, students evaluated highly their training and their experiences in the program. While many were confident in their new abilities, especially academic management, several expressed anxiety at managing behavior problems in the classroom without the constant supervision of the project.
- B. A survey of project graduates who are now teaching is currently in process. The majority of responding graduates state they were well prepared in the areas of behavior management, academic instruction, legal issues, and ARD/IEP development. (In Texas, the Admission, Review, Dismissal [ARD] meeting is the IEP meeting). Several graduates indicated they wished they had additional training in academic instruction and ARD/IEP development and cited specifically “dealing with administration” and “customizing instruction for various ability levels.” Due to the feedback, these areas will be addressed in more detail for current and future students.
- C. Several needed program staffing modifications were approved by the Project Officer. Upon startup, the individual slated for the role of Practicum Supervisor, Nancy Turner,

became unavailable. To fill her role Mrs. Barbara Shows, M.Ed. was hired. Mrs. Shows has done an outstanding job. Also, at the end of Year One, Dr. Hollie Cost resigned from SFASU and her role as Project Coordinator. To fill this void, Dr. Glen McCuller, Project Director increased his time on the project from 10% to 15% and Mrs. Barbara Shows added the title of Coordinator and some of the Coordinator duties to her job.

- D. An additional required modification was to increase the recruitment of full-time students seeking special education certification and a master's degree. We had proposed recruiting 8 full-time students per year and 4 part-time, that is, students seeking only to add the SED/A endorsement to an existing special education certification. However, in the first two years of the project, we recruited only 3 of 8 part-time positions. Therefore, in Year 3 with approval, we used funding for part-time students and recruited 12 full-time students.

(7) Disseminate program methods and outcomes

- A. This final report was prepared to disclose the projects, methods, and outcomes. Dissemination will occur in several ways. First, conference presentations have been and will be used to present methods and outcomes of this project. At the 2002 Texas Council for Exceptional Children (TCEC) conference, the Project Director detailed the behavior management procedures taught in the program to an audience seeking information on procedures to share with Paraeducators. At the 2003 conference of TCEC, the Project Director and the Coordinator will present on the academic procedures taught and the parent, peer, and administrative support it has engendered.
- B. A second method of dissemination will include mailing copies of the Final Report to all interested parties, including the Texas and Louisiana State Education Agencies, the Texas

Regional Resource Centers, area school districts, the Project Consultant, and the original Project Coordinator.

- C. The final dissemination method will consist of creating a website accessible through the Department of Human Services web page at *www.sfasu.edu*. This site will post the final report for this project and provide information about the current project to prepare teachers to serve children and youth with emotional disturbance or autism.



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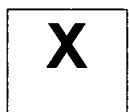


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